

California Stem Cell Agency Adopts Stringent Conflict of Interest Rules

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Los Angeles, CA – Taking a step forward to advance ethical standards, leaders of the California stem cell agency acted today to adopt a stringent set of rules governing its grant-making, policy-making, scientific and administrative practices. The policies are designed to prevent any real, potential and/or apparent conflict of interests.

After careful consideration, and with extensive input from the public, members of the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee ("ICOC"), the governing Board of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine ("CIRM"), voted to adopt conflict of interest codes for ICOC members, advisory working group members and CIRM staff. The rules were established to be strict and enforceable, without being unreasonable.

CIRM was established in 2004 with the passage of Proposition 71, the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative, and will be responsible for disbursing \$3 billion for stem cell research to California universities and research institutions over ten or more years. The statewide ballot measure, which will provide about \$300 million a year in funding for stem cell research at California universities and research institutions, was overwhelmingly approved by California voters, and called for the establishment of an entity to make grants and provide loans for stem cell research, research facilities and other vital research opportunities.

In a report prepared by CIRM Interim President Zach Hall, Ph.D. for the ICOC members' consideration of the policy, Hall notes that the rules were explicitly crafted with recognition that "the success of the CIRM research program and the Institutes' ability to maintain the confidence of the people of California depends critically upon our ability to fund the highest quality research proposals, without bias." In the same report, Hall concludes, "Strong CIRM conflict policies are thus essential."

"The California stem cell agency is committed to strong and effective conflict of interest policies," said ICOC Chairman Robert Klein. "The Institute and its governing board are dedicated to complying with stringent conflict of interest and ethics policies in the interest of advancing science, medicine and the public good." Added Klein, "These policies, which provide a stringent and balanced framework for responsibly advancing stem cell research in California, were adopted after hearing extensive public comment and thoughtful consideration and discussion by ICOC members."

Highlights of the policies include:

- ICOC Members are required to report all of their financial interests, and to recuse themselves from voting on matters in which the member may have a financial interest, consistent with the California Political Reform Act with which all state public officials must comply.
- Grants Review Working Group members, who comprise an advisory committee responsible for the technical review of research grant applications and making recommendations to the ICOC on scientific research funding, are required to disclose and report all financial, professional and personal conflicts of interests, and to recuse themselves from any grant review in which they have an interest, under penalty of perjury. This policy is closely modeled on the policies of National Institutes of Health and the California Breast Cancer Research Program.
- Medical and Ethical Standards Working Group members, who comprise an advisory committee responsible for making recommendations to the ICOC on medical and ethical standards that will guide the scientific research program, will be required to disclose any potential financial, professional or personal conflicts of interest. This policy is consistent with that of the National Academies for its committees.
- CIRM staff members cannot participate in any review of scientific or facilities grant applications in which they or their close family members could receive financial benefit. Further, CIRM employees cannot have financial or property interests in any organization that applies for funding from CIRM or in any organization with substantial interests in stem cell therapy. The new standards are in addition to the Statement of Incompatible Activities that the Board adopted last month for CIRM staff.

For the complete text of CIRM's conflict of interest policies, please visit the Institute's website, www.cirm.ca.gov.

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